

The Mamikonids and the Liparitids

by Cyril Toumanoff

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[125]

THE MAMIKONIDS AND THE LIPARITIDS

Two important Caucasian princely houses, playing a decisive role in Armenian history, claimed imperial Chinese origin: the Mamikonids and the Liparitids. This legendary claim was, as we now realize, quite erroneous; and we, moreover, know how it originated.

The Mamikonids were immemorial dynasts of the Armeno-Georgian march of Tayk or Tao, appearing for the first time in history with Mancaeus, one of the war-lords of Tigranes the Great, King of Armenia (95-56 B. C.). They held the hereditary office of High Constable of Armenia; reigned, in addition to Tayk, in a half of Tarōn (centred at Ołakan); and acquired, through the marriage in the fifth century with the heiress of the patriarchal Gregorids, the latter's principalities: the other half of Tarōn (centred at Aštišat), Bagravandene, and Acilisene. The Mamikonids were among the greatest Armenian princes and their role in the history of Armenia and, also, of the Eastern Empire is too well known to require comment. The eighth century, as a result especially of the unsuccessful insurrection against the Caliph in 771-772, ushered in an era of decline for the dynasty. Most of their principalities were lost, chiefly to the rival house of the Bagratids, but they managed to retain the sovereignty of the south-western part of Tarōn until the end of the twelfth century¹.

The Liparitids made their appearance in southern Georgia (in Lower Iberia) in the second half of the ninth century, as dynasts of Trialeti, with the stronghold of Klde-Karni, and then acquired a great number of ducal fiefs. From their chief stronghold of Orbeti, in the Duchy of Samšvilde, they derived in the eleventh century the name of Orbeli, which later became Orbeliani. Since, it is therefore only after that time that one may call them Orbeli or Orbeliani, the broader *nomen gentilium* of Liparitids has been adopted here. This house remained, until the end of the Georgian kingdom and in the Russian Empire thereafter, at the summit of the Georgian nobility. The peak of the Liparitid greatness was reached, however, in the eleventh-twelfth centuries, when this

1. For the Mamikonids, see my *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (Georgetown University Press, 1963), pp. 209-211, 270, 323-324, n. 81, 452-453. (In n. 238, p. 211 omit the erroneous reference to Markwart, *Streifzüge* 133-134).

house held quasi-hereditarily the office of High Constable of Georgia and was locked in equal struggle with the royal house of the Bagratids. By the end of the twelfth century the Bagratids had come out victorious, and the main line of the Orbelis was forced by King George III of Georgia to remove to Armenia. There it acquired the Principality of Siunia and reigned as its third dynasty down to the fifteenth century².

There are three chief sources for the Chinese claim of the Mamikonids and one for that of the Liparitids, all Armenian. Here is a résumé of their information.

1. Faustus of Buzanda, *Hist. Arm.*, 5. 4: King Pap of Armenia [367-374]³ says to the Mamikonid prince Mušet I that the Mamikonids are as noble a race as the royal house, their ancestors having been Emperors of China⁴.

Faustus, 5. 37: Exchange of high words between the Mamikonid prince Manuel I and King Varazdat of Armenia [374-378], previous to their single combat. Manuel asserts that, from ancient times, the Mamikonids have been, not vassals, but companions of, and superior to, the Kings of Armenia, because their ancestors were Emperors of China; they came to Armenia as a result of a fratricidal struggle at home. And Varazdat replies, not without irony, that, since the Mamikonids are, on their own admission, foreigners, being descended from the Emperors of China, let Manuel go back to China and reign there.

2. Sebēos, *Hist. Heracl.*⁵, Part 2 of the Prolegomena: Mamik and Konak, sons of Kaṛnam, highest dignitary of the Chinese Empire⁶, rose against Čenbakur, Emperor of China⁷, their brother uterine, but were defeated and fled. They came eventually to Iran, whence the Great King Artabanus⁸ [v (215-224)], in order to keep peace with the Emperor of

2. For the Liparitids, see my «The Fifteenth-Century Bagratids and the Institution of Collegial Sovereignty in Georgia», *Traditio*, 7 (1949-1951), 179-180; *Stud. Chr. Cauc. Hist.*, pp. 210, 214 and n. 238, 270.

3. The dates of the kings of Armenia are given here according to P. Ananian, «La data e le circostanze della consecrazione di S. Gregorio Illuminatore», *Le Muséon*, 74 (1961), 360.

4. ... թագաւոր աշխարհին ձեռնաց.

5. I am, of course, aware of the recent attempt to ascribe the History of Sebēos to Xosrovik (cf. *Stud. Chr. Cauc. Hist.*, p. 18), but must confess to not being sufficiently convinced by the arguments advanced in its favour (cf. also *Revue des études arméniennes*, 1, 1964, 203-215) to alter the traditional designation of this important source.

6. ... երկրորդ ի թագաւորութեան ձեռնաստանի.

7. ... զթագաւոր աշխարհին ձեռնակուր. For the significance of the last word, see *infra* at n. 30.

8. ... Արտաւանոյ արքայի Պարթևաց.

China, sent them to Armenia. They are the ancestors of the Mamikonids. — Sebēos claims to have heard this story from the Chinese Ambassador to the Court of the Great King Chosroes [II (590-628)].

3. Ps. Moses of Chorene, *Hist. Arm.*, 2. 81: The Emperor of China⁹, Arbok Čenbakur had two foster-brothers, Bēdox and Mamgun. Denounced before the Emperor by his brother and threatened with death, Mamgun fled to the Great King¹⁰ Ardašir [224-241], who refused to surrender him to the Emperor of China. But Ardašir's son Sapor [I (241-272)], in order to keep peace with him, sent Mamgun to Armenia. The Mamikonids are descended from him.

Ps. Moses, 2. 84: Mamgun is called Chinese¹¹.

So much for the Mamikonids. Now for the Liparitids, —

4. Stephen Orbelian, *Hist. Siun.*, 66: As a result of a fratricidal struggle among the members of the imperial family of China, following the death of the Emperor Čenbakur, those who were defeated in it fled the country. One of them arrived, through the Daryal Pass, in Iberia (East Georgia) before the reign of the first King Pharnabazus [IVth century B. C.]¹², and received the stronghold of Orbeti, from which his house derived its name¹³.

It has been recognized that passages from Faustus, Sebēos, and Ps. Moses are all part of the so-called Epic of the Iranian War, which has been preserved precisely in the above historical works and also in Agathangelus¹⁴. It must also be presumed that the Epic, in this context, drew upon the family legend of the Mamikonids, which must have existed independently of it. Indeed, the version of the Epic found in Agathangelus does not refer to that legend. Now, that the passage from Stephen Orbelian represents the same family tradition, is extremely difficult to doubt. Especially so, since Stephen represents exactly the same version of the tradition as Faustus, except for the divergences that are, as will be seen, susceptible of an explanation; while Sebēos and Ps.

9. ... թագուոր ձենաց.

10. ... թագուոր Գարսից.

11. ... ձենացնայի Մամգուն.

12. For the half-legendary first King of Iberia (East Georgia) Pharnabazus (Parnavaz), see *Stud. Chr. Cauc. Hist.*, pp. 80, 89.

13. Georgian territorial surnames are formed with the suffix *-el(i)*, which usually replaces the territorial suffix *-et(i)*. Stephen, *Hist. Siun.*, ed. K. Sahnazarian (Paris, 1859; reprinted, Tiflis, 1910), p. 371, gives both the correct form *Orbēl* and the unusual one *Orbūl*.

14. E. g., M. Abelyan, *Istoriia drevearmjanskoy literatury*, I (Erevan, 1948), 165-157, .59.

Moses represent together a somewhat different version of the same tradition.

Thus, while Faustus and Stephen assert the royal origin of their heroes, Sebēos and Ps. Moses make it distinguished indeed, but not royal: for the former, Mamik and Konak are brothers uterine of the Emperor and sons of the highest dignitary of the Empire, but for the latter Mamgun is merely the Emperor's foster-brother. In Faustus it is stated that the Mamikonids were in Armenia from ancient times; and this, *mutatis mutandis*, is exactly what Stephen claims for his heroes' ancestor: the times before the first King Pharnabazus are indeed Iberia's « ancient times ». On the other hand, both Sebēos and Ps. Moses place the arrival of the Mamikonids in Armenia in the third century after Christ. According to both Faustus and Stephen, the cause for leaving China was a struggle in the imperial family; but Sebēos gives as the cause a revolt against the Emperor, and Ps. Moses a denunciation before him. Faustus speaks of the arrival in Armenia, and Stephen of the arrival in Iberia, as directly from China. But both Sebēos and Ps. Moses mention a preliminary arrival in Iran and the Great King's anxiety to keep peace with the Emperor of China as the reason for the subsequent removal to Armenia. No *praenomen* of the *émigré* ancestor is given by either Faustus or Stephen; while Sebēos has Mamik and Konak (for two brothers), which is an obvious splitting of the *nomen gentilicium* of Mami-kon(ean), and which Ps. Moses alters to Mamgun.

This identity of legendary claims regarding the origins of the two families made it possible for the late Professor N. Adontz to conjecture that the Liparitids were a branch of the Mamikonids¹⁵. But there are other indications to support this conjecture, including the nature of that identity itself. We may now examine these indications.

1. The Liparitids appeared in Iberia in 876¹⁶, that is, about a century after the decline of the Mamikonids had set in Armenia. The Georgian lands had always offered asylum to Armenian dynasts, and especially so in the years 771-772 and thereafter. Thus, several Bagratid branches removed there, one of them destined to ascend the throne of Iberia and then to build the monarchy of United Georgia¹⁷; then also members of

15. N. Adontz, *Armenija v ėpoxu Justiniana* (St. Petersburg, 1908), p. 404.

16. *Chronicle of Iberia (Matiane Kartlisa)*, ed. S. Qauxčičvili, *Kartlis Cxovreba*, I (Tiflis, 1955), p. 258: « Liparit [I] took possession of the lands of Trialeti and raised the castle of Klde-Karni, and David, son of Bagrat, came to power (*ipatrona*) ». David I succeeded his father Bagrat I as Bagratid Curopalate of Iberia in 876: Tumanoff, « The Bagratids of Iberia from the Eighth to the Eleventh Century », *Le Muséon*, 74 (1961), 17-18.

17. Thus, at the beginning of the eighth century Smbat IV Bagratuni fled to Western Georgia (*Stud. Chr. Cauc. Hist.*, p. 345) and his sons migrated after

the House of Gnuni¹⁸; and, what is of particular interest, in 771, a Mamikonid prince, Artavazd, who acquired important domains there¹⁹. The Liparitids, who a century later figure in the Georgian sources among the most important dynasts of Iberia, with domains situated not far from the Armenian border, may well have been descended from Artavazd or from his kin.

2. Almost from the start, the Liparitids showed a predilection for the *praenomen* Rat, which seems to be a derivation, unique in mediaeval Georgia, from the Armenian Hrahat²⁰; and this was the name of the father of several Mamikonid princes who were among the leaders of the insurrection of 771-772²¹.

3. The struggle between the Mamikonids and the Bagratids in Armenia — in which the former lost most of their domains to the latter — and that between their presumable descendants the Liparitids and the Bagratids in Georgia — in which the former nearly wrested from the latter half the realm²² — have the appearance of one and the same family feud, which these dynasties may have carried with them as they removed from one country to the other.

748 to Eastern Georgia (*ibid.*, pp. 346-352). After 772, Ašot IV Bagratuni established himself in southern Tayk, on the Georgian confines, wresting it from the Mamikonids (*ibid.*, p. 453), and Adarnase, son of Vasak Bagratuni, settled in Upper Iberia and founded the Georgian branch of the Bagratids (*ibid.*, pp. 345, 351, 412-416).

18. Vartan, *Univ. Hist.* (Venice, 1862), p. 77; cf. *Stud. Chr. Cauc. Hist.*, p. 453, n. 63.

19. Leontius, *Hist. Arm.* (St. Petersburg, 1887), pp. 138-139. The statement of this source: *Իսկ ևոցա երթեալ պատասխարէին յաշխարհին եղերացոց. եւ սասանայր անձամբ զԵրանուկին անձին իւրոյ ի վերայ եղերացոց եւ վերայ Վեդիայ, որ են Վիրք* is patent hyperbole. It may indicate, however, that Artavazd indeed acquired considerable domains in Georgia, for great local princes have not infrequently been confused by foreign writers with kings; cf. *Stud. Chr. Cauc. Hist.*, p. 257, n. 6: one of the confusions concerns, as a matter of fact, a Liparitid, Liparit IV (cf. *infra* n. 22) whom an Arab source calls « King of Abasgia » (= West Georgia).

20. Four Liparitids bore the name of Rat in the eleventh and twelfth centuries: cf., e. g., F. Justi, *Iranisches Namenbuch* (Marburg, 1895), p. 445. Oddly, on p. 259, Justi fails to connect Rat with the Armenian Hrahat (for which, see p. 102). And yet the contemporary Byzantine rendering of Rat as Ῥατίος (Cedrenus, *Hist. comp.*, ed. Migne, P. G., 122, 304: Ῥατίος) seems to indicate that originally the Georgian name must have been something like *Hrat.

21. Leontius, p. 139; cf. *Stud. Chr. Cauc. Hist.*, pp. 347-351.

22. Liparit IV, Duke of Trialeci, Argvefi, Lower and Upper Iberia, High Constable of Georgia, forced in 1045/6 King Bagrat IV of Georgia, through the mediation of the Emperor Constantine IX, to cede to himself something like the southern moiety of the kingdom: *Chron. Iber.*, pp. 298-305; Cedrenus, col. 304-305. Stephen, p. 374, speaks of him as possessing half the kingdom.

4. As the Mamikonids were enfeoffed of the office of High Constable in Armenia, so the Liparitids held quasi-hereditarily the corresponding office in Georgia, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries²³.

5. And now the Chinese claim itself. It is only from Stephen that this claim of the Liparitids is known to us. No mediaeval Georgian source that has reached us mentions it. Stephen indeed claims to have drawn his information from Georgian sources, as also that the hatred of the victorious George III was responsible for the obliteration of Liparitid memories in Georgia. And, actually, Stephen manifests a certain conversancy with Georgian sources. Nevertheless, it may well be supposed that he simply took from Faustus (whose version of the legend is, as we have seen, the same as Stephen's own) the story of the Chinese origin of the Mamikonids and merely adapted it to the Georgian background of the Liparitid branch which had settled in Siunia and to which he himself belonged. But if that be so, no explanation is possible as to why he failed to mention the Mamikonid and, in general, Armenian past that is inseparable from the story of Faustus, and why he made the Chinese ancestor of the Liparitids arrive, instead, in Iberia and from the north. In Armenian society, the Princes of Siunia, who had recently migrated from Georgia, and the Archbishop of Siunia himself — Stephen — would have found a connexion with the dynasty of national heroes distinctly to their advantage. This consideration obliges one to abandon the supposition of a borrowing from Faustus and to admit that Stephen must have used the legend in the form in which the Liparitids had brought it from Georgia. And this alone can explain the avoidance of any mention of the Mamikonid and the Armenian past.

The nascent nationalism of the recently united Kingdom of Georgia must have made it necessary for a leading Georgian family to avoid all mention of a recent foreign extraction; and if an illustrious foreign origin was to be admitted, it was to be pushed far into the past. In addition, the confessional enmity between the two neighbouring nations²⁴ made it imperative to consign to oblivion Armenia and, therefore, the Mamikonids. Thus, only the imperial Chinese origin was retained. That this conjecture is correct is borne out by the fact that this is precisely

23. Stephen, pp. 372, 378, actually claims that the Liparitids were (hereditary) High Constables and also Coronants of Georgia (აღმარაუბრო, ვერაგუნიცა, აკრძალა, მთავარი).

24. A passage from the *Histories and Eulogies of the Sovereigns (Istoriani da azmani Saravandedlant)*, ed. Qaučišvili, *Kartlis Cxovreba*, II (Tiflis, 1959), 81-90, will suffice to show what ghastly extremes this confessional enmity had reached by the time of Queen Tamar, at the end of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth century.

what happened in the case of the Liparitids' rivals, the branch of the Bagratids that had come to reign in Georgia. In the *History of the Bagratids* by the eleventh-century historiographer of the dynasty, Sumbat son of David, the arrival of the Bagratids in Georgia is pushed further back; their Armenian past is studiously concealed; but the legend of Hebrew origin, which had developed among the Armenian Bagratids, is kept and improved upon as the legend of the Davidic descent²⁵. Accordingly, the suppression of the Armenian and Mamikonid connexions is the best proof that Stephen's account of the legend of Chinese origin is the genuine Liparitid account of it. And the identity of Stephen's version with the version of Faustus is the best proof that the Liparitids were indeed a Mamikonid branch. Since Faustus was a historiographer of the Mamikonid dynasty²⁶, his version must be the version accepted by the Mamikonids themselves. And it is near to the historical truth in stating that the Mamikonids were in Armenia from ancient times, for, as has been seen at the beginning of this paper, they were already a leading family of Armenia in the Artaxiad period. On the other hand, the version of Sebēos and Ps. Moses is not only more recent than that of Faustus, but also more glaringly inexact historically in implying that the Mamikonids were in Armenia only after the third century; and it does not represent the Mamikonids' own version. Sebēos and Ps. Moses were historiographers of the rival Bagratids²⁷; and so Sebēos may to some extent have been affected by the anti-Mamikonid bias, which is well known in the case of Ps. Moses²⁸. This must explain why their version ascribes to the Mamikonids a more recent Armenian past and a humbler Chinese origin.

On one point Stephen is in accord with the second — one may call it Bagratid — version of the Chinese legend of the Mamikonids: it is the title *čēnbakur*, used as the name of the Emperor of China, while Faustus refers to him simply as «King of the land of China»²⁹. As for *čēnbakur*, it is a compound of the ethnicon *čēn*, meaning Chinese — whence the toponym *Cenastan* meaning China — and *bakur*, a derivation of the

²⁵ Cf. *Stud. Chr. Cauc. Hist.*, pp. 422-428.

²⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 128, n. 223.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Cf. *op. cit.*, p. 332 and n. 127. While it is true that Ps. Moses is quite inimical to the Mamikonids, Sebēos is not. It is only in the eighth century that Mamikonid-Bagratid relations had passed from rivalry to strife (and this is one of the reasons for dating the work attributed to Moses of Chorene as not before the eighth century: cf. *op. cit.*, 330-334). But a certain rivalry had indeed long existed between these two leading dynasties; hence even the account of Sebēos about the Mamikonid beginnings is more modest than the Mamikonids' own version.

²⁹ *Supra* n. 4.

Iranian *bağpur*, itself a translation of the Chinese imperial title of *t'ien-tzu* or Son of Heaven³⁰. Markwart suggested that the reference to *Cenbakur* must in reality be one to the King of the Kushans, who also entitled himself Son of Heaven (*dēvaputra*)³¹. But he fails to take into consideration the fact that Faustus, Sebēos, and Ps. Moses clearly distinguish between the Chinese and the Kushans³². What, however, is more important, is the fact that in the seventh-century Geography of Ananias of Siracene, the Chinese are called *CenR*, their silk production is commented upon, and their sovereign is called *Cenbakur*³³. Markwart's attempted interpretation was doubtless due to his acceptance of the legend *au pied de la lettre* and his desire to substitute for the distant Chinese, the more likely because less distant Kushan provenance.

There can be no serious doubt that the Mamikonid legend concerns China, but this is not to say that the legend must be true. Markwart's attempt to salvage the legend would not have been necessary, had he accepted Adontz's more plausible theory. According to the latter, the ethnicon *čen* of the legend is merely the result of a misinterpretation, or rather of a *livresque* interpretation, of the ethnicon *čan*, denoting a sub-

30. Justi, *Iran, Namenbuch*, p. 240; cf. *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Ed., 2 (1965) s. v. « Faghfur ».

31. J. Markwart, *Südarmanien und die Tigrisquellen* (Vienne, 1930), pp. 77*-79*. It is hardly relevant to our problem that some Chinese translations of Buddhist legends speak of the King of the Kushans as *čen-tan*, in which Markwart saw a rendering of *Cinasthana-dēvaputra*. What is important is that the Indians meant China when they used the word *Cinasthana* (cf., e. g., N. Pigulevskaja, *Vizantijska putja v Indiju* [Moscow/Leningrad, 1951], p. 179). And it is, moreover, difficult to suppose Armenian historians of the fifth-eighth centuries to have had access to Chinese translations of Buddhist literature. Markwart also cites the Syriac Alexander romance where the Kushan State is referred to as *Cin*. There is, too, the additional fact that some tenth-century Muslim sources mistook the Khaqan of the Uigurs for the neighbouring Emperor of China: Markwart, *Osteuropäische und ostasiatische Streifzüge* (Leipzig, 1903), p. 89. But all this is pointless beside the fact that the Armenians were quite clear what they meant when they used the word *Cen* or *Cenastan*: *infra* at nn. 32, 33. Modern Armenian uses *Cinastan* for China. — Of the several attempts to salvage the Mamikonid legend by situating the land of *Cen* nearer in Asia, I refer here only to Markwart's, as coming from so high an authority.

32. Faustus, 5.4 (Chinese); 5.7 (Kushans); 5.37 (both); Sebēos, 19 (Chinese); 2, 18, 25 (Kushans); Proleg. 2 (both); Ps. Moses, 2.81 (Chinese); 2.2, 67, 68, 72, 73, 74 (Kushans).

33. Like Ptolemy, on whom he depends, and other ancient writers, Ananias knows China as divided into two nations, the northern Seres (their land: Serice) and the southern Sinae. Thus he refers to Ptolemy's Σηρικη as Սիւրիկա... որ է Տեւք (Siwnikia... which is CenR) and to the Σιναι as ... Սինայեանց ... երբ Տեւքաց ([land] of the Siwnetik, close to the CenR): *Geography*, Asia 37, 38. The two names as given by Ananias are practically synonymous.

division of the proto-Georgians and represented by the Tzanni, the Can-lazi, etc. As dynasts of the Armeno-Georgian march of Tayk in the Monarchy of Great Armenia³⁴, the Mamikonids may well have been either of proto-Georgian Can origin or at least influenced by the Can element. Indeed, the basic element of their surname, which may initially have been a gentilitia title, is *mamik* or *mamak*, which is a compound of the Armenian diminutive suffix *-ik* and of the Georgian *mama* or father. What is more, one of their favourite *praenomina*, *Mušeł*, appears to be a territorial epithet formed from their city of Muš through the addition of the Georgian territorial suffix *-el*, Armenianized as *-eł*³⁵. Accordingly, the Mamikonid Chinese legend was made possible by a mere change of a vowel; and it was well in keeping with the tendency evinced by many princely dynasties of Armenia to provide themselves with splendid and exotic origins³⁶.

If indeed the Liparitid version of the Chinese legend represents, as we have reasons to suppose, the Mamikonids' own version, then a certain detail it contains, and which is not found in Faustus, nor in the version of Sebēos and Ps. Moses, may prove of considerable interest. It is the description of the family's standard. It has been seen that the legendary arrival of the Mamikonids from China to Armenia was, on the Georgian soil, changed into that of the Liparitids from China to Iberia. Both arrivals are said to have occurred in ancient times. It may, therefore, be assumed that some at least of Stephen's references to the early Liparitids are in actual fact memories of the early Mamikonids, prior to the establishment of their Liparitid offshoot in Georgia. Now we know that the Armenian princes had their distinctive standards, with inchoate heraldic bearings on them. Regrettably, the sources have not preserved the description of any of these princely flags³⁷. Thus Stephen's description of one may be the only such description to have reached us, — precisely of the banner of the Mamikonid dynasty.

Unfortunately, the text of Stephen is, on this point, marked by a

34. Whatever their origins, historically the Mamikonids were an Armenian dynasty, one of the chief houses of the Monarchy of Great Armenia. For the vicissitudes of Tayk as a marchland, see *Stud. Chr. Cauc. Hist.*, pp. 450-456, 498.

35. Adontz, *Armenija*, pp. 402-403, 405, 398; for *Mušeł*, see also Markwart, *Südarmenien*, p. 157 n. 1. — For the Pontic Georgian land of Caneti, or Lazistan, see A. Gugushvili, «Ethnographical and Historical Division of Georgia», *Georgica*, 1/23 (1936), 64. Ananias speaks of it (... եւ 'ի Ճանիւս որ են Յաղախի): *Geogr.*, Asia 19; and also Ps. Moses (... 'ի Ճանիւս Պոնդապոն, որ են Յաղախի): 276.

36. J. Laurent, *L'Arménie entre Byzance et l'Islam* (Paris, 1919), p. 69; *Stud. Chr. Cauc. Hist.*, p. 140, n. 245.

37. Faustus, 4.2; cf. *Stud. Chr. Cauc. Hist.*, p. 117, n. 193. Faustus, *op. cit.*, indeed speaks of banners with eagles and falcons, but does not specify what families had what banners.

certain, quite tantalizing, ambiguity. The description of the standard is given in the midst of an enumeration of the Liparitids' ancient honours. Thus he says that they had as their own « twelve *drōšē*, a thousand men each *drōš* (*կրկնասանն զբոշս եւ յամեն զբոշ՝ հաղար ալբ*) » and then goes on immediately to say: *եւ զի սահման էր թաղաւորին սպիտակ լինելի վասն եւ կարմիր նշան ունել, հրամայեցին սոցա կարմիր ունել զվառ զբոշին եւ սպիտակ նշան ի վերայ* »³⁸

The ambiguity of the text is due to the fact that it contains three different words, which can all mean « flag » — *drōš*, *vař*, and *nšan*; and that of these, moreover, the last two have other recognized meanings: « ornamental cloth », « brilliance », « burning », and « flame » (modern) for *vař* (as a noun), and « sign » or « emblem » for *nšan*. On examination, the word *drōš* (which I will render as « banner »), too, acquires a second meaning. The phrase « twelve *drōšē*, a thousand men each *drōš* » cannot obviously refer to banners in the sense of a flag attached to a pole, but is unquestionably used in the extended sense of a military unit assembled under a banner. This was precisely the occasional mediaeval Georgian use of this Armenian word that became *droša* in Georgian, as, for instance, when the First Historian of Queen Tamar speaks of a handful of Georgians defeating the Turks who commanded « twelve banners (*iormetisa drošisani*) »³⁹; or when the armed forces of the Kingdom of Georgia were divided into four « banners »⁴⁰.

The description of the Liparitid standard follows, as a logical sequence, this statement about the twelve « banners » of the house. Which means that, having referred to the « banners » in the extended sense of military units, the author proceeds to describe the flag which, attached to the pole and thus making a « banner » in the strict sense, served as a rallying point for each of the twelve units. But, since the Liparitid standard was an inversion of the royal standard, the latter is described first. Thus Stephen states that, while the rule was for the King's to be the white *vař* and to have a red *nšan*, they [i. e., the Liparitids] were ordained to have a red *vař* and a white *nšan* over the banner. The word « king » (*iagaworin*) is either in the genitive or in the dative case. However, the fact that it is followed by the verb « to be » (*line!*) makes it clear that the phrase in which it is found cannot be translated as though it were in the dative, i. e., as « the rule was for the King to be the white *vař*, etc. », for that is patently absurd. The

38. *Hist. Sium.*, 66, p. 378.

39. *Hist. and Eulogies*, p. 56.

40. Vaxuřt of Georgia, *Geogr. Descrip. of Georgia*, ed. M. F. Brosset, *Description géographique de la Géorgie par le tsarévitch Vakhoucht* (St. Petersburg, 1842), pp. 34, 36, 304, 384, 388, 390, 392. The area of a *droša* was called *sadroša*.

translation, then, must be based on the genitive of « the king », i. e., « the rule was for the King's [word omitted] to be, etc. ». The omitted word can be easily guessed: since this phrase is a sequel to the statement about the banners, it, clearly, must be: « the rule was for the King's [banner, in the strict sense] to be the white *vař* and to have a red *nřan* ». While this was the case with the King, the Liparitids were ordained to have a red *vař* and a white *nřan* over the banner.

There remains the ambiguity of the words *vař* and *nřan*. The passage can be construed as meaning that while the King's standard was a white flag, or cloth, and (i. e., with) a red emblem, that of the Liparitids was a red flag and (with) a white emblem. Brosset⁴¹, however, thought it possible to translate this passage otherwise, that is, in the sense that the King's standard was a white flame and (i. e., on) a red flag, while that of the Liparitids was a red flame and (on) a white flag. In either case, the meaning of *drōř* in *drōřin* . . . *i veray* (« above », « over », or « on the banner ») ought to be in the extended sense of a military unit, because saying that a flag (even in the sense of cloth) is on/over/above a banner in the strict sense (rather than over a pole), is absurdity. Very possibly, the meaning here is « each banner », repeating what is said in the earlier sentence about banners. The first alternative, with « emblem » (« sign »), is vague; in fact it tells very little of how the princely banner in question was emblazoned. In this, it is somewhat out of keeping with Stephen's detailed treatment of the Liparitid honours. For instance, as has just been seen, he gives an exact number of banners and of men (albeit patently exaggerated), not contenting himself with a vaguer phrase like « a multitude of men in each banner ». Likewise, after the passage we are concerned with, Stephen goes on to mention that, in Court ceremonies, the Liparitids carried a staff with a lion's head⁴²; instead of saying something like « a staff with an animal head » or « a staff with an ornament ». The second alternative, with « flame », would not be acceptable in a Classical Armenian text, for the *grahar* does not seem to know *vař* in the sense of « flame ». But Stephen's Armenian cannot boast the Classical purity of its vocabulary. This interpretation is more precise than the first alternative and so more in keeping with Stephen's style at this juncture. This second alternative, then,

41. Brosset, *Histoire de la Sioumie de Stéphanos Orbélian*, I (St. Petersburg, 1864), 215, « Mais comme l'étiquette attribuait aux rois la flamme blanche, sur un drapeau écarlate, on leur avait ordonné de porter la flamme écarlate sur un étendard blanc ». J. Saint-Martin, *Mémoires historiques et géographiques sur l'Arménie*, II (Paris, 1819), p. 77 has: « Comme c'était l'usage que le drapeau des rois fût blanc, et la bannière qu'on mettait au-dessus rouge, on régla que le drapeau des Orpélians serait rouge, et la bannière blanche ».

42. *Hist. Siun.*, p. 378: *զուազան անիծարդութիւն*.

could be as follows: « and since the rule was for the King's banner to be a white flame on a red flag, the Liparitids were ordained to have a red flame on a white flag over each banner ».

If Brosset be right, then the quasi-heraldic standard of the Mamikonids must have been — in heraldic terms — *argent a flame gules*. As for the royal standard, it may of course refer to an historical reality (Armenian or Iberian: it is difficult to tell which); but it seems far more likely that it never existed, being a deliberate inversion of the Mamikonid-Liparitid heraldic configuration, resorted to by the author in order to signify the quasi-royal status of the Mamikonids-Liparitids, a status that the version of Faustus and of Stephen himself endeavours to emphasize⁴³.

If such indeed be the Mamikonid emblem, what can have been — it may be asked in conclusion — its origin? One possibility presents itself as an explanation. The Gregorid inheritance, gathered by the Mamikonids in the fifth century, included, as has been seen, the principalities of Acilisene and of Aštišat-Tarōn. In the latter, the Gregorids had succeeded, after the Conversion of Armenia, the Vahnunis, formerly the dynasty of the High Priests of Armenian paganism claiming descent from the god Vahagn⁴⁴. Both Acilisene and Aštišat were temple-states in pre-Christian times. Acilisene's city of Erez was the centre of the worship of Anahit or Anaitis, the Iranian fertility goddess, syncretized here with Artemis⁴⁵. And Aštišat was the centre of worship of three divinities: Vahagn syncretized with Heracles, the Great Mother, and Vahagn's paramour Astlik⁴⁶, the Armenian version of Ištar, syncretized with Aphrodite and tending to merge with Anahit⁴⁷. Both the cult of Vahagn and

43. Several Georgian princely houses have deduced their descent from the Liparitids and one from the Armenian Mamikonids: *Stud. Chr. Cauc. Hist.*, pp. 211-212 (n. 238). 270. Among the former, the house of Orbeliani has borne the additional surname of Jambakur(ian) which is derived from *ženbakur*. Georgian heraldic data are admittedly of little value to the historian, because (for reasons which it is beyond our scope to investigate here) heraldry did not become systematized in the Russian Empire before the eighteenth century, and in Georgia before its inclusion in that empire. Nevertheless, one may expect Georgian coats of arms to have been influenced, in some instances at least, by memories of the past. Accordingly, the dexter chief of the quartered Orbeliani arms is gules a banner argent; and the sinister chief of the quartered coat of the Barafads, another Liparitid house, is azure a dexter hand issuing out of a cloud from the sinister side and grasping a banner argent charged with a quatrefoil gules. — in which it is not difficult to see a variant of the flame.

44. Cf. *Stud. Chr. Cauc. Hist.*, pp. 215, 218.

45. Strabo, 11. 14. 16; Pliny, 5.33; Arm. Agathangelus, 5.48, 53, 59; 6.68; 12.127; Gk. Agathangelus (Langlois, *Coll. hist. armén.*, I), 21, 24, 28, 57; Ps. Moses, 2.14.

46. Arm. Agath., 114.809; Gk. Agath., 141; Faustus, 3.14; Ps. Moses, 2.14.

that of Anahit were associated with fire. Vahagn was the son of Heaven, Earth, and Sea, born of a red rush, and emerged out of a flame⁴⁶; and, as is witnessed by pre-Sassanian Iran, the cult of Anahita was particularly associated with that of fire⁴⁷. In these circumstances, the pagan past of the Gregorid-Mamikonid princely States was connected with pagan religion in its igneous spect. It can therefore be assumed — and this is no more than a conjecture — that the memory of this connexion, subsequently purged in Christian times of all pagan religious association, survived as a vestigial, and quasi-heraldic, symbol of the dynasty that reigned in these two States.

CYRIL TOUMANOFF

Georgetown University

47. J. Karst, *Mythologie arméno-caucasienne et hétéro-asianique* (Strasbourg / Zurich, 1948), p. 58; R. Grousset, *Histoire de l'Arménie* (Paris, 1947), p. 119.

48. Cf. Abelyan, *Ist. drevenarm. lit.*, I, 31-35.

49. Cf., e. g., R. Ghirshman, *Iran* (Penguin Books, 1961), p. 270.